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Mood somber as school board approves cuts for 2012-2013

Posted on January 26, 2012 by Jody Purdom

In the end, the cuts came down as planned and not one single person in the room was happy about it. At stake? Some \$2.6 million in cuts to the 2012-2013 public school budget that will rake five days out of the school calendar, nixes middle school sports and classes at Sonoma Valley Adult School, cuts money for transportation and takes a huge chunk out of the budget for school janitorial, among other items (see full list below).

In a prepared statement, current school board President Gary DeSmet lamented the loss of nearly two dozen district jobs saying, "Every job is a friend and neighbor, very likely with a dependent family." He went on to laud all staff members for their grace and respect during the budget cut process commending them for not lashing out and/or placing blame. "It has been a gift to witness," he said.

The mood was somber throughout the meeting, opened with comments from Sonoma Valley Unified School District Superintendent Louann Carlomagno who said, "It is with great difficulty that we move forward in making these reductions. Unfortunately, we also face additional challenges with the Governor's further reduced budget."

Deputy Superintendent Justin Frese laid out a best and worse case scenario for additional cuts that could come down the pike next year. "Best case, the

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state passes a tax measure that would aid schools but would still eliminate statewide funding for transportation. Worse case, if the tax measure doesn't go through, we're looking at an additional reduction of \$370 per student as well as the elimination of transportation funding for next year for a total of \$1.6 million in additional cuts.

"Unfortunately our work tonight is not the end of the conversation when it comes to budget reductions for 2012-2013," said Frese.

This news comes on the heels of mid-year cuts in December that took approximately \$55,000 in ADA reductions and an estimated \$320,000 to transportation funding for a total of \$375,000. Before the vote, school board members each took a turn to speak followed by public comment. Several district employees took to the podium to speak their peace.

"This just personifies the tidal wave to our district," said long time Prestwood teacher and VMTA President Gary Griffith who called the meeting 'sad.' "You hear about it in other districts but now it is ours to contend with. I don't think we are doing enough as a community to make our voices heard in Sacramento."

One after the other, district employees spoke to the board. As board member Helen Marsh put it, "Our mission has always been to take care of our employees so that they will take care of our children. Now, we're not going to do that and it will be visited on the families in our community, not just on our children."

Finally, the motion was made and carried, the vote and cuts official for next year.

Reductions as follows:

Grade 2 Class Size Reduction \$200,000

- Three Buy Back Days \$325,000
- Five Furlough Days \$542,420
- Core Replacement \$34,000
- SVHS Independent Study 50% \$60,000
- Gateway School \$100,000
- Sonoma Valley Adult School \$267,000
- Middle School Sports \$51,287
- Library Elementary 25% \$33,812
- Transportation \$110,000
- Reorganization of Custodial Services \$506,620
- District Office \$100,000
- Special Education \$155,000
- Supt., Deputy Supt., SVHS Principal \$9,500
- Middle School FTE 0.6 FTE each site \$95,000

- Total \$2,589,639

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